

# Of Secrets and Centaurs

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Category: Harry Potter

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-10 08:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-10 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 16:32:07

Rating: T

Chapters: 3

Words: 9,465

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: This is TNF still- part four, and it's starting to get scary...

## 1. Default Chapter Title

> <br> Lavender Brown slunk out of the shadows and raced up the stairs to the dorms, nails biting into her palms. In his lap. In his lap. The little slut was curled up in his lap, face buried in his shirt. What was her face doing in his shirt? Her face was not to be around any part of his body. She stormed around, viciously wiping off her make-up and ripping her robes from her body. As she flung herself back onto her bed, in a tank top and underwear, she screamed under her breath. So she didn't take warnings. So she ignored obvious signals. Lavender Fields Brown was not above playing dirty. The firecracker escapade pushed the line. Broke the barriers. As she settled back with a smile, she silently declared war. If it was a dirty fight she wanted, it was a filthy fight she would get.

> <br> (\*)

> <br> Harry lay back in bed, sniffing like a child. The strange thing was, he wasn't ashamed at all. The tears were refreshing to him, and as he rolled back and forth, he thought back on the way the night had ended. He saw himself standing up, shivering as Hermione hugged him goodnight. He saw George picking up Maddie, still crying into his chest, and carrying her to bed. He saw Ron whispering in his ear, "Are you okay?" and himself nodding vigorously. He felt much closer to her. And he knew that he owed her reciprocation. He wanted to find her and talk to her for hours. He wanted to chase the storms from the skies. He wanted to turn back time. He wanted to erase her pain. But most of all, he wanted to sleep.

> <br> Breakfast the next morning wasn't awkward, much to everyone's surprise. Maddie was a little more subdued than usual, but she smiled at everyone as they greeted her good morning. In fact, the most personal conversation of the morning involved her eyes.

> <br> "Um, Maddie, I have to ask you something." Fred had a strangely mirthful look in his eye as he lifted Maddie's chin. She stared back with a wrinkled brow.

> <br> "Huh?"

> <br> "Well, Squirt, I've been noticing something rather interesting about you over the past few months. Last night, I know for certain that your eyes were yellow. This morning, you're sporting a maroony color. I've also seen purple, blue, brown, green, and orange. Will you explain this?" She grinned and giggled.

> <br> "You guys figured out one of my secrets! These aren't just any old color changing specs. This is pure accident." She grinned again at their blank faces. "When I was little and my dad was babysitting me, he'd keep me occupied by putting gentle Tickling Charms on me. One night, he was muttering the words under his breath when our cat knocked a crock of milk over in the kitchen. It startled him and he yelled the wrong words. When he looked down, my formerly brown eyes were gray! He nearly had a fit, but I didn't seem hurt, and he liked the gray color, so he didn't try to fix it. I don't suppose my mom was overly enthusiastic, but my dad was a charmer, so I got to keep them. It really surprised them when they were a different color the next day. And then different the next. And the next. They change on their own accord, and they can be any color of the spectrum."

> <br> "Very interesting," said Harry, staring right in her eyes. Hermione came up and did the same.

> <br> "I wish I knew what spell he used. It probably could have been Tidious Rotacious, but I'd bet ten Galleons that it was Recturm Juigrios." They were all taking turns pressing their noses to hers and having staring contests when someone came and ended their fun in a flash.

> <br> "Potty, Weasel and his know-it-all arm ornament. Oh look, and Granger's know-it-all in training. A fine little group." Draco Malfoy was smirking down at the table, flanked as usual by his 'goons'. All of the Weasley's and Harry made movements to stand up, but Maddie and Hermione held them back. Then Maddie stood up, and everyone watched with bated breath.

> <br> "I don't think that you can say anything about me, Draco. You don't know a thing except that I know more about nightshade than you." Draco's face contorted with anger, but he quickly regained his signature smugness and leaned closer to Maddie, who, standing on a raised platform, was at eye level with him.

> <br> "Fine then, Maddie, lets learn about each other. I'm a pureblood Slytherin who's fifteen. Now you."

> <br> "What do those questions have to do with anything?"

> <br> "Everything. What's your mother?" Draco folded him arms and waited.

> <br> "My mother is a nurse. Muggle nurse." Draco pursed his lips narrowed his eyes. Hermione was once more fighting with Ron to keep him in his seat.

> <br> "And your father?" Draco asked with renewed contempt. Everyone turned to Maddie.

> <br> "He was a Muggle as well."

> <br> "Was?"

> <br> "Was. Please stop asking questions."

> <br> He didn't bother to keep himself from chuckling. "So sorry."

> <br> "No, your not," said Maddie evenly, "so don't waste your apologies on little old Muggle born me. Why don't you go back where you belong?" Draco spat at her feet and swept away before Harry could break Maddie's grasp on his shoulders.

> <br> "What the hell is the little bugger's problem?" growled Fred.

> <br> "He glanced in a mirror before he came over here?" suggested Maddie in a little innocent voice, causing some of the tension to

melt away with laughter. They finished breakfast quickly and left for classes, Ron, Hermione and Harry walking protectively close to her. Maddie allowed them to treat her like a child, but as she left the Great Hall, her aunt's words flashed through her mind. But she was wrong, right?

> <br> (\*)

> <br> Fred shifted impatiently back and forth outside the boy's bathroom. Why was George always filling up his bladder right before they were set to pull a prank? He checked his watch and blew his breath out through his cheeks. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Lavender Brown rushing towards him. He turned to slip into the bathroom, but she was too quick, and was at his elbow in seconds.

> <br> "George, I have to tell you something."

> <br> "Lavender, I'm not Geo-" She put a finger to his lips and he jerked his head back quickly. She frowned slightly.

> <br> "I don't have much time. I just wanted to tell you something. Something that I really think you should know. I know that you and Maddie are pretty close, but, well, that's all an illusion."

> <br> "What are you talking about? An illusion?"

> <br> "When you first met her, you hated her, but she was so desperate for friends that she enchanted you, Fred, Harry, and Ron. So that you would like her, and hang out with her. Poor dear, she's was so socially inept that she needed magic to make friends." Fred stared at her like she had twelve heads.

> <br> "When you tried to put a love charm on Ron last year, Professor McGonagall put protective spells on all of us in the Gryffindor house. No one can put any manipulative spells on us that last longer than twenty-four hours. Besides, Maddie can't turn a tortoise into a teapot. She couldn't pull off a Fake Friends Charm." Lavender turned a shade of reddish purple and spun on her heel to storm away. Fred was left behind, chuckling softly as she swished self-righteously down the hallway. George ducked out of the bathroom and looked at his doubled over twin.

> <br> "What's so funny?" he asked in a hushed tone.

> <br> "Just Lavender Brown- I'll explain later. We've gotta go." George nodded and they snuck off to Filch's office, snickering like children.

> <br> (\*)

> <br> Hermione was across the castle, studying in the library with Ron, when she got another sharp pain across her forehead. She groaned and put her head down on the desk.

> <br> "You okay, Hon?" Ron asked cautiously. For the past few weeks she been like a bomb, and Ron had been tiptoeing carefully around the fuses. The littlest things would set her off, so he was always trying to balance giving her enough space and enough attention.

> <br> "I think.... Ron, I think I might be sick." He grinned and sighed in relief, bringing his forehead down to hers.

> <br> "Hello there, Mistress of the Obvious. Now are you ready to go to Madame Pomfrey and become the Hermione I know and love again?" Hermione pulled away with a little gasp.

> <br> "Ron, I said I was sick, but I don't need to go to the hospital. Ugh, I shouldn't have said anything at all...I know she'll make me stay the night."

> <br> "Come on, Herm. Just go in, get the potion you need, and you're done. In and out. Five seconds...you'll feel much better." Hermione tried to stay firm, but the truth was, the headache was starting to get out of control, and she couldn't shake the annoying feeling of constant tiredness. Finally, after a few more minutes of weak resistance, she gave in. Ron triumphantly grabbed her arm and hurried her off to the infirmary on the third floor. Madame Pomfrey,

the school's slightly over enthusiastic nurse, promptly set her on the table for an in-depth examination, Hermione giving Ron meaningful glares that screamed; "I told you so." Finally, she stepped back with a grim look on her face.

> <br> "Well, I never thought I'd say this inside these walls, but dearie, you have mononucleosis." Hermione let another low groan and dropped her head into her hands. Madame Pomfrey was for some reason glowering at Ron, who was very much so lost.

> <br> "What's nucleosis?"

> <br> "Mononucleosis is a month long sickness, that's what it is!" cried Hermione in despair, "I guess that explains the headaches and the tiredness, but I certainly don't have a month to spare."

> <br> "You can only contract it certain ways," snapped Madame Pomfrey, her eyes spitting flames at Ron. He turned to Hermione exasperatedly, silently asking for clarification.

> <br> "Muggles call it the Kissing Disease," she said wearily. Ron's eyes widened, and then he regained the confused look.

> <br> "Then how come I didn't get it, too?"

> <br> "Probably because Muggle borns are more susceptible to Muggle diseases than purebloods- right?" Madame Pomfrey nodded. "Please tell me that you have something for me!"

> <br> "Yes, I do have something that should clean it up. But it'll take at least one night of bed rest." She held firm even under Hermione's protests and Ron's assurances, and Hermione dejectedly climbed into the hospital pajamas.

> <br> "Herm, I'll bring you your homework, okay?" Hermione nodded angrily, and he left her a quick kiss on the forehead. She stared out the window, and around the empty infirmary, until Madame Pomfrey brought over a beaker of something brown and bubbling.

> <br> "Drink up!" she called cheerfully. Hermione, still angry with her, took it and drank it silently. It tasted like Polyjuice potion and coffee and peach juice, all mixed together. Not a pleasant combination, but it started to ease her headache right away. Madame Pomfrey snatched the empty beaker and then looked worriedly at the short girl lying on the bed.

> <br> "Where did you spend your summer dear?" Hermione looked up at the odd question.

> <br> "Half of it in Ellesmere, where I live, and the other half just outside of Hogsmeade, where Ron lives. Why do you ask?"

> <br> "And you and Ron, you're on...kissing terms?" she continued, ignoring Hermione's question.

> <br> "You might say that, yes," Hermione said suspiciously.

> <br> "So- throughout the whole summer- he was the only one you were on those terms with? No one else?"

> <br> "Of course!" said Hermione indignantly, "Why are you asking me all this?!"

> <br> "Well, it's just that, this disease, if you did pick it up during the summer, should have been zapped the second you entered the school's protective fields. You would have had to pick it up around the end of August, and you were in the wizarding world then. Consorting with wizards. I don't understand how you got it. Unless..."

> <br> "Unless what?" Madame Pomfrey looked up like she had forgotten Hermione was there, and promptly pasted a cheerful grin on her face.

> <br> "Not to worry dear! Now just lay back and rest, and maybe tomorrow I'll let you go to classes." Hermione scowled at Madame Pomfrey's back as she bustled into her office. Was something wrong with her? And what about the protective fields? She struggled with all the questions in her mind, but what she didn't add into the

equation was the Sleeping Draught Madame Pomfrey had slid into her medicine. By the time Ron returned with her books, she was out like a light.

> <br> (\*)

> <br> "So she's stuck in there over night? Poor Herm, she must be going crazy," said Maddie as she ate a bite of her chicken breast. Ron shook his head and snatched some of her noodles off her plate.

> <br> "Nope, when I got there, she was fast asleep. But I'm glad-she needs some rest."

> <br> "What'd you say she had?" asked George.

> <br> "Um, I think Pomfrey said it was...nucleiodis?" Ron scratched his chin thoughtfully.

> <br> "Was it mononucleosis?" asked Maddie with a grin.

> <br> "Oh, yeah, that was it."

> <br> "The Kissing Disease. Geez, Ron. See what happens when you don't come up for air?" Harry teased his blushing friend. Maddie joined in the laughing, but the twins looked lost.

> <br> "It's a sickness that teenagers usually get, because one of the ways you can get it is making out to much." George and Fred started cracking up at Maddie's explanation.

> <br>

> "So I guess we'll have to write Mum, explain the situation..." Fred nearly spit milk out his nose.<br>

> "Okay, okay, leave him alone guys. I don't see you three with any girlfriends to give kissing diseases to," remarked Maddie with a grin. She ducked Harry's playful cuff and shared a good laugh with Ron. George grabbed her around the waist and hoisted her into his lap.<br>

> "What do we need a girlfriend for, when we've got you, Shortyfries?" He said in a loud voice, tickling her. Fred and Harry joined in. She squirmed and tried to wriggle out of their grasp, but they were holding on to tight. She reached out one of her hands and scooped up a handful of mashed potatoes from someone's plate. She flailed her arm and rubbed them vigorously into Fred's red hair. He jumped back, surprised.<br>

> "I wouldn't have done that if I were you," he admonished, dumping a plate of spaghetti down her robes. Some of it missed her and splattered onto Harry, who shoved a stick of butter in George's face, thinking it was Fred. Ron dumped a cup of pink lemonade on top of the whole pile of mush, and before you knew it, a five-person food fight had broken out at the Gryffindor table. It took two teachers to stop the rumpus, and they were all dragged to McGonagall's office. They stood in front of her desk, quite a sight to behold. Maddie had spaghetti on her robes, pink lemonade dripping from her long hair, and butter clumping her eyelashes. Harry had gravy all over his glasses and a piece of chicken sticking out one of his ears. Fred and George were hard to tell apart, but one of them had a head full of potatoes and the other had a face full of butter. Ron was towering above everyone else, sopping the carpet with milk and wiping cheesecake out of his eyes.<br>

> "Well, what do you have to say for yourselves?" asked a stern Professor McGonagall. None of them trusted themselves to talk, afraid they would burst out laughing.<br>

> "I see that you have had a quite an interesting dinner. I hope you enjoyed yourselves, you will pay for your moment of fun in detention." There was a collective groan. "No, I don't want to hear it. You'll get your notices at breakfast tomorrow. Now I suggest you go and get yourselves cleaned up." McGonagall watched them leaving in a line, but waited until she was sure they were out of hearing

distance to break down and laugh herself silly.<br>

> (\*)<br>

> Draco Malfoy walked leisurely away from the Great Hall, for once, alone. Crabbe and Goyle were still at the Slytherin table, feasting on whatever they could get their grubby hands on. No one, anywhere, realized how much he despised them. But they're important, he reminded himself, to the image you uphold. Remember what Dad told you. You're a Malfoy, and it's vital that these people remember that. He straightened up a little and managed to increase the smirk across his face. He was just about to duck into the secret passageway that led to the Slytherin common room when he saw a blonde girl racing towards him. On closer look, he saw it was Lavender Brown, one of those Barbie doll types. Wasn't she a Gryffindor? What was she doing on this side of the castle? What was she doing on this side of the castle, racing towards him?<br>

> "What do you want?" he snapped as she stood in front of him. She matched his frown pit for pat.<br>

> "I don't want to talk to you anymore than you want to talk to me. I have some information that may interest you." <br>

> "What kind of information- and while we're asking questions, why are you giving it to me, anyway?" Draco looked down at her painted-on face suspiciously.<br>

> "Let's just say we have a common enemy- Maddie Wells?" She watched the shadow cross his face at her name. Excellent. "I happened to-overhear- her talking about her dad, and how he died. She has some serious guilt problems about his death. Seems that she was inadvertently the cause of it." Lavender paused for effect, nearly shaking with the excitement of what she was scheming.<br>

> "That's your interesting information? What am I supposed to do with that?" Draco asked skeptically. Lavender gave him a look that one would give a small, slow child.<br>

> "Well, how would you feel if you were sitting happily in class when all of the sudden someone comes up and confronts you about such a sensitive topic? The guilt will be at an all time high, and she'll be humiliated in front of a whole large group of people. Just like she humiliated you." Draco swallowed heavily and narrowed his already small eyes. God, he thought, she sure knows what buttons to push.<br>

> "What do you gain from humiliating Madison? Seems like a mean trick for a girl like you to be pulling." Lavender's face twisted to mirror Draco's anger-taunt one.<br>

> "She has something that's mine, and I've never been big on sharing. If all goes well, this will be my big chance. I'm not letting her get away this time."<br>

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## 2. Default Chapter Title

The next day Hermione was let out of the hospital at the same time as all her friends were thrust into detention. She passed Maddie in the hallway, on her way to go and clean the bedpans in the infirmary. She filled her in quickly on the days events, happy to see the Hermione seemed much better.

> <br> "A food fight? Honestly, you'd never know they were seventeen." Hermione smiled as she spoke of the twins who had grown to be like older brothers to her.

> <br> "Well, I started it," admitted Maddie. Just then, Madame Pomfrey sharply gestured for Maddie to 'get in here!'. Maddie waved goodbye to Hermione as she slid in the infirmary.

> <br> "You will go to each bed, take the bedpan off it, put in on the rack, then wheel them over to the sink and wash them with the disinfecting soaps. I want them washed whether they are dirty or not." Madame Pomfrey gave her the wheeling cart and busied herself checking on the other inhabitants of the sickrooms. Maddie wrinkled her nose as she lifted the dirty bedpans and carefully put them on her cart. She was nearly halfway through when Dumbledore entered the room with a little tinkle of a bell on the door.

> <br> "Madame Pomfrey? I just got your message, and I believe we should talk about it right now." Madame Pomfrey looked up and hurried over to the silver-haired man who looked uncharacteristically worried. Maddie automatically moved into the shadows of the curtains surrounding the sink. Her years of trouble making experience made it easy for her to disappear as the two adults moved closer.

> <br> "I checked the status of the fields the second I got your message. In all of our records, they are in perfect working order, but when I put a light virus on a cat to test the fields, it wasn't picked up at all. I notified several other wizarding organizations, including Zaverdia."

> <br> "That's the company that keeps fields on residential areas, right?"

> <br> "Yes, yes, that's them. Everyone has reported similar problems. Many fields are faulty; several are just plain non-existent. I'm calling out to some Potions companies today; we'll need to stock up. Who knows what types of Muggle viruses will be sneaking in now? I'm having a man from the ministry come and check the fields with me. I'm worried this could be connected to the events over the summer. The most important thing I need to stress to you is this; do not panic. Also, try to keep things quiet. I don't want rumors spreading until we have a most definite idea of what we are dealing with." Madame Pomfrey vigorously nodded, gulping as she did so. Dumbledore tipped his hat and quickly left, no doubt off to meet the Ministry man. Maddie slowly picked up the bedpan and resumed washing, but her head was spinning at all that she had just heard. Was something ELSE going on at Hogwarts? Harry, Ron and Hermione had told her some of the adventures they'd had in their time there. Maybe this was a normal occurrence of some sort. At any rate, she was bursting to get out of the smelly sink and talk to her friends about what she'd heard.

> <br> Unfortunately, she didn't get that chance, because the second she got out of the infirmary, it was time for dinner. She was running late and nearly sprinted to the Great Hall. Dashing inside and slipping down next to Fred, she was pleased to see the dinner was codfish, her favorite. She threw back her hair and ran to the line to grab a plate. By the time that she had returned, everyone was digging in. That is, except Ron and Hermione, who seemed to be deep in conversation across the table. Maddie was just getting ready to ask the twins about their detention in the dungeons with Snape, when someone above her cleared her throat. She looked up into the gray eyes of Draco Malfoy.

> <br> "So you've lost your way again, huh? Slytherin table's over there." Maddie lazily pointed across the hall and turned back to her plate, but Draco stood firm with the same evil smile on his face.

> <br> "Oh, Maddie, I don't think I'll go just yet. I thought we could do some more bonding." The tone of his voice made her abandon the rapidly cooling food and stare at him worriedly.

> <br> "What are you playing at?" She narrowed her eyes and gazed at him critically.

> <br> "Well, I've been wanting to get back to that 'was' question.

Exactly how did your daddy get to be a was? Cause I've been hearing some interesting theories..." Maddie began choking on a bite of salad.

> <br> "You don't know anything about me or my father," she said in an intense whisper, her whole demeanor tense, "Shut up and get the hell away."

> <br> "Touchy, touchy, touchy. Why so defensive all of the sudden? I think I may know why," he leaned closer to her silver dollar sized eyes, "Is it because you know who is responsible? Is it because you're responsible?" He leaned back, satisfied, as tears splattered down her face. People nearby began to take notice, among them Fred, George, and Harry.

> <br> "Why are you doing this?" she whispered through her tears.

> <br> "Stop pretending, Maddie. You killed your dad, didn't you?" Draco had stopped bothering to keep his voice down, allowing it to carry to Ron and Hermione, who looked up as well. Everyone seemed frozen in their seats as Maddie stood up, sobbing now.

> "SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP!!" Draco crossed his arms, still chuckling his evil laugh.<br>

> "Poor girl, you must be so wracked with guilt. Not many girls can say they killed their father at fourteen. And now the whole school knows about it." He gestured to the hordes of people who were watching, stricken. Maddie stood, shivering violently and choking on wracking sobs. Thousands of thoughts were racing through her head, thousands of curses on the tip of her tongue. How, in God's name could he have possibly known? How could anyone be so cruel and uncaring? All she wanted to do was disappear. Just disappear, into oblivion, forever and ever. So much was pulsing through her- hatred, pain, guilt, shame. She wanted to go far, far away from everything that was hurting her so badly. So she did.<br>

> (\*)<br>

> Fred stood up as Maddie leapt from her seat and ran from the Great Hall, still crying. He was literally shaking from fury, and clenched his hands into fists as Draco turned to stroll away, calm as if he had just come over to get a forgotten homework assignment.<br>

> "Malfoy! Get back here." His voice gave one the impression that he'd been snacking on nails instead of fried fish. Draco slowly turned around, snapping his fingers behind his back. In a second, Crabbe and Goyle had lumbered over, and were standing a few paces behind him. Only then did Malfoy face Fred Weasley, who had been joined by a group of his friends.<br>

> "What did you say to her? Why in God's name did you just do that? I want a good reason, Malfoy. A damn good reason." Draco smiled a little smile, the presence of the two muscle machines behind him giving him a false sense of security.<br>

> "She's a little mudblood who needs to learn her place in this school. She had a fault; I showed it to the world. She deserved it and I'd do it again. Is that a good enough answer?" He finished with little shake of his head and turned to leave.<br>

> "I guess it'll do," growled Fred as he hurtled over the table and landed on Draco, pinning his face down. He flipped him over on his back and straddled him, grabbing him tightly around the neck as he did so. Then he whipped out his wand and pressed it to Draco's temple. He twisted to see if his goons were coming to save him, but George, Harry and Ron had them pinned to the floor as well.<br>

> "So," choked Draco with the small bit of air he was allowed, "it seems that anger really does boost adrenaline. Convenient that I decided to go all the way with this one, eh?" Fred pressed his wand harder against Draco's head. <br>

> "Keep talking, Malfoy. God knows I'm mad enough. So give me a



reason. Please, do it. Go ahead. You've dug your grave, ready to lie in it? Tell me this, if you want to live. How did you know?"<br>  
> "Laven- Lavender Brown," gasped Draco, just in time. At that moment, several teachers ran over to the group, hitting Fred, George, Ron and Harry with freezing spells. As soon as everything was sorted out, they unfroze the boys and set about hauling them off to Dumbledore's office. As Fred was dragged from the room, he sent a chilling glare in Lavender's direction. He shook with emotions, as well as the realization of what he had just done. And on top of all that, where was Maddie?<br>

> (\*)<br>

> Run, run, run, run, run, and run. Maddie was not Miss. Athlete, but she pounded the ground with everything in her, as fast as she could go, she ran. Not looking, caring. She reached the front doors and bolted through them without registering the actions. I knew it, she thought bitterly, the second I open up, the pain begins. Hurt and sorrow always shadow the happiness I find. She continued into the falling dusk, tears and sweat dripping down her face and stinging her eyes. Tripping didn't stop her, only momentarily slowed her. The rumbling thunder overhead did not slow her down, nor did it break her out of the haze she was in. As she went further on, the branches whipping her face and thorns tearing at the exposed flesh of her ankles did not make her stop and get her bearings. Only when a huge flash of lightening broke the normal night sounds did Maddie stumble and fall down on the ground, gasping for breath.<br>

> Her surroundings were the stuff of nightmares. Twisted, knarled trees with frightening holes in their middles, shrieking owls in their boughs. Bats and ravens flew together in little groups, swooping down among the huge bundles of thorn bushes. Sharp rocks and splintered logs littered the winding path. All it needed was an empty mansion and some sinister background music. She began shaking violently, unsure if it was from the rain that was soaking her robes or the fear that was throbbing in her veins.<br>

> "A forest," she said aloud, "I ran into a FRICKEN FOREST!!!!" She threw her hat as hard as could, but a gust of wind picked up and threw it right back at her. She left out an enraged scream and threw herself down on the ground, bringing the hat up over her head. She knew she should work on finding her way out, finding a trail or something, but she didn't have the will. It scared her, but she didn't want to. She didn't want to get out. She wanted to stay in the evil forever.<br>

> But after about an hour, her suicidal inklings had long past, and she was desperate to get back inside the castle, no matter the humiliation or explanations she would face in it's walls. All she wanted was a warm bed where she could happily sleep. Happily, what a joke. She shakily stood up and brushed the hair that was plastered to her face aside. She was just about to the leave the little group of trees and set off to find her way back when she heard a violent rustling in the thorns behind her. She began crying again; sure some horrible, mutated creature was about to eat her head off.<br>

> "But I like my head," she whispered softly, through her tears. The rustling increased with her sobs, and she heard a clicking of hooves behind her. So it has hooves, perfect. I'm dying at the hand of a hooved monster. Won't Draco be pleased? She turned slowly around and screamed loudly. There, standing in the thorn bush, was a centaur. Half man, half horse. His human part was strong looking and handsome, while his horse half was a beautiful golden color.<br>

> "Little child," he spoke softly, "why do you cry?" Maddie sniffled and wiped her nose on her sleeve.<br>

> "Well, I kinda ran away, and now I'm really, really lost." The

centaur jumped back at the sound of her voice.<br>

> "Stars above, it's the Golden Child. What have you wandered into this place for? It is extremely dangerous for you to be here. How long have you- can't you see the stars alignment? The time of death is very, very near. You must leave. Now!"<br>

> "The Golden Child? The time of death? What are you talking about!?" Maddie was staring suspiciously at the centaur now. "Who are you?"<br>

> "My name is Gandar, and I am a centaur who lives within these forest confines. I am set against the Heavens, my vows are steady and true. I cannot answer any questions or explain any confusion. But I must force you to leave. The danger that lurks here grows stronger every minute you stay."<br>

> "I told you, I'm lost! I don't know how to get back to the castle." Maddie looked about to cry again, and Gandar shifted nervously, flicking his tail.<br>

> "I'm not supposed to help humans...but you are the Golden Child...there are exceptions to every rule, no matter who sets them..."<br>

> "Who is the Golden Child? WHAT is the Golden Child?"<br>

> "Ah, ask me no questions. I will help you, but you must help me. The legend of your wonderful voice is spread far and wide through the forest. You will have a free ride to the castle if you will sing to me on the way." Maddie stared at him.<br>

> "How did you know I could sing?" she asked in amazement.<br>

> "My child, I beg you, ask nothing of me. Do you accept the offer?" Maddie debated it. Gandar and his extensive knowledge made her uneasy, but the wind was growing stronger and her fingertips were wrinkled from the constant rain.<br>

> "Yes, I'll do it. But, there is one thing. I don't know how to ride a horse." Gandar looked scandalized and flicked his tail again.<br>

> "I am not a common horse, I am a centaur. Simply climb onto my back and hold onto my waist. You can sing on the way." Maddie clambered aboard and held tightly to his toned waist. She wracked her brain and settled on Close Every Door, another song from the musical Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. It was a guy's solo, but she switched the octave and sang it anyway. When she had finished, Gandar leaned back and beamed at her.<br>

> "Oh, there is very little for us to fear. The Golden Child's voice is like that of an angel's." Maddie settled back, trying to keep warm with the gale force winds and chilling rain. She was about to ask Gandar how much further it would be when she felt his back go rigid.<br>

> "Gandar?" she called over his shoulder. He turned his head to her, and she pulled away from him, screaming aloud. His eyes were a shade of opaque white and his mouth was hanging open, tongue lolling out. Then, words started streaming from his mouth, but his lips didn't move.<br>

> "Norax is near, nearer than before. Pretty little girl. Sing for me. SING!" Maddie started crying and was about to jump off of the still moving centaur, when the voice changed from a low growl to high, falsetto.<br>

> "He is near and people will die. Run and hide. Run, run, run, scream, scream, scream. He will overtake you in a horrible dream." Maddie was sobbing now, pounding on Gandar's bare back with her fists. She felt him go limp and his front half fell forward, hooves still running towards a light source on the edge of the tree line.<br>

> "GANDAR!!!" she screamed, trying to pull his torso up. He slowly

shook his head and turned back to her, bleary but blue-eyed once more.<br>

> "Child, it is not necessary to yell. Please just sit back and relax, we are nearing the edge of the forest."<br>

> "Gandar- you were saying things...and your eyes went all blank...and you were talking about Norax." Gandar spun around sharply.<br>

> "Norax? Child, I would never, ever speak such a name to you." His face changed to a sympathetic expression. "Little child, the rain is making you see and hear things that you aren't really seeing and hearing. I will increase speed, and we will be to the school soon." Maddie continued crying, from fear and chill and pure need to be in someone's arms. As they sped through the undergrowth, she saw purple people dashing in and out of huge red boxes. Huge chocolate snakes wound around trees and flickered blue mice on their tongues. Then Donny Osmond popped out of a hole on the ground and began singing Any Dream Will Do to her. As the children's chorus let out a resounding, "Ah-ah-ah," she slumped forward, letting her eyes close gratefully against Gandar's wet back. The blackness folded in and she was finally at rest.<font>

### 3. Default Chapter Title

Rubeus Hagrid took a sip from a large bottle of Ogden's Best Firewhiskey and reached down to absently rub Fang's head. The night was cold and rainy, as the nights had tended to be lately, but he was warm and happy in his little hut. He stirred his late night dinner of soup and thought moodily about the news he had gotten from Dumbledore that afternoon. What was all this about fields and such? He had never seen Dumbledore be so unsure of something. It was unsettling to know there was something that his mentor and surrogate father didn't have total control over. He was mulling over this when he saw a movement outside of the window. He moved closer and was shocked to see a centaur, with something draped around his back.

> <br> "What's he doin out of the forest?" Hagrid muttered under his breath as he walked to the door.

> <br> "Gandar! What are you doin way out here? And what have you got there?" Hagrid ushered his friend inside and picked Maddie up like she was a rag doll. "This is Harry's friend! I'd better get her up to the school. What happened?"

> <br> "I found her in the forest, she was lost. I think she must have been out there a long time before I came, because she was quite delirious. I trust you will get her home safely. I will be off." Hagrid nodded to Gandar as he quickly wrapped Maddie up in a blanket and tucked her somewhat under his jacket. As he hurried up to the school, he felt around for her pulse. Satisfied with the slight throbbing, he broke into a light run and made it to the doors in seconds. He crashed through and ran into Professor McGonagall, who was staring anxiously out a window.

> <br> "Hagrid! Oh my word, is that Madison Wells? Wha-what happened? We've been looking everywhere for her."

> <br> "Gandar, a centaur friend of mine, found her in the forest. She's out like a light, but still breathing."

> <br> "The Forbidden Forest!? God knows what could have happened to her! Hurry, lets get her up to Madame Pomfrey's." Hagrid nodded and set off up the staircase, accompanied by a Professor who was wringing her hands. As they entered the infirmary, Madame Pomfrey gave a loud gasp.

> <br> "My stars, get her over here, quickly now. She's soaked to the

bone!" Hagrid laid her down on the bed and stood back awkwardly, standing out in the stark cleanliness of the white room. As Madame Pomfrey went to get some dry pajamas, Hagrid and Professor McGonagall moved closer to the bed, staring at the bedraggled specimen in front of the of them. She started stirring, lightly, back and forth, and her huge eyes fluttered open. She looked around like she had never seen any of them before.

> <br> "Maddie, can you tell us what happened?" asked Professor McGonagall urgently. Maddie smiled.

> <br> "I sang to the horse man and then a purple people eater taught me how to be Donny Osmond." She giggled and fell back on the pillow, eyes closed once more. Hagrid and Professor McGonagall shared a mystified look, but Madame Pomfrey clucked her tongue and bustled up to her, putting a hand across her head.

> <br> "Poor girl, she's burning up with fever. I have something that'll fix it right up, but I'd still like to keep her overnight." Professor McGonagall nodded and turned to leave, as did Hagrid. Professor McGonagall swiftly walked to Dumbledore's gargoyle and took the staircase up to his office.

> <br> "Albus, they found her. She's in the hospital right now." All the heads in the room looked up.

> <br> "What happened? Is she all right?" asked George. All five of the boys were still in Dumbledore's office, awaiting punishment. Draco was on one side of the room, and the other four were seated on the other. The plan was to wait for Maddie to come, so that Draco could apologize, and so she could confirm what exactly had happened.

> <br> "Will she be able to come and chat with us?" Dumbledore was maddeningly calm.

> <br> "No, Poppy wants to keep her overnight. She ran into the Forbidden Forest and is suffering a fever." She shot Draco an accusing look at these words, and the boys across the room positively glared. Dumbledore gave McGonagall a warning look of sorts and cleared his throat.

> <br> "Well, we can't stay in here all night. I have to say that I believe Mistery Weasley and Potter as far as the content of the conversation leading up to the violence." Draco started to argue, but Dumbledore put up his hand. "Mr. Malfoy, that is my decision. Now, we will deal with you first. You will apologize to Miss. Wells, serve two detentions, and fifty points will be taken from Slytherin." Draco's jaw dropped, image forgotten. "Now I don't believe in punishment without explaining it. The subject matter you were dealing with was very sensitive, and the matter that you confronted her stands out as well. You were doing this just be mean, and that is not looked kindly on in this school. You inadvertently landed that poor girl in the hospital, and that is a serious offence as well." Dumbledore turned to Harry, Ron and George. "You, boys, were involved on a much smaller level, but pinning two boys to the floor is still breaking the rules. Each of you lose ten points for Gryffindor." The boys nodded, knowing they had gotten off relatively easy. They nervously turned to Fred, who was the only left. The room was silent as Dumbledore sighed. "Mr. Weasley, you are the hardest one to figure. I admire that you were willing to stand up for Miss. Wells, and it is pleasing to see that she has found such close friends already. But, what you did astounds me. You forced Mr. Malfoy down, gave him a bloody nose, black eye and threatened his life. I know from the bottom of my heart that you would never go through with it, but..." He trailed off and would not meet Fred's eyes. "I'm relegated to give you a week of in-school suspension." There was a collective gasp and Fred gulped.

> <br> "Bu-but sir," started Fred, but Dumbledore put up his hand wearily.

> <br> "Mr. Weasley, please go and retrieve some clothing. You are not to speak with anyone. Once you have gotten what you need, come back to my office and we will discuss punishment." Fred, eyes still wide, got up and left quickly. Draco was holding back a gleeful smile, but once he caught sight of Ron, Harry and George's faces, he stopped.

> <br> "Boys, you may leave. Draco, you will receive notices about your detentions tomorrow at breakfast." Draco got up and nearly ran out of the room to get far away before the boys were let out. Dumbledore still had not turned around; he was staring out the window at the swirling leaves. Soon the room held only Professor McGonagall and Dumbledore.

> <br> "Albus," said Professor McGonagall haltingly.

> <br> "Minerva, I didn't want to. I won't be able to look that boy in the eyes for a very long time." He turned around wearily. "Lucius Malfoy will be irate. I'm surprised he isn't swooping down in here right now. I have to write Arthur Weasley right now, and explain everything. This is extremely unfortunate, but I can't ignore...how could the Malfoy child possibly be so hateful?" Professor McGonagall looked closely at the man who had meant so much to her for so long. For the first time, she could see that the lines surrounding his eyes and mouth were not from laughter. Framed in the flickering candlelight, he was quite suddenly nothing more than an old man with too much on his silver platter.

> (\*)<br>

> When Maddie was let out of the hospital the next day, her head was positively spinning. She cautiously ran to the common room and burst inside, looking wildly around for her friends. It was the Friday afternoon break, and she knew they would be there.<br>

> "Maddie!" She looked up and saw Hermione running towards her. They hugged tightly, and sat down on the nearest couch. Maddie scanned the room.<br>

> "Where's everyone?" she asked. Hermione bit her lip and scooted a little closer.<br>

> "The boys are visiting Fred in in-school suspension." Maddie's jaw dropped and she grabbed Hermione's shoulder.<br>

> "What happened? How'd he get in there?" Hermione bit her lip even harder and squinted at Maddie.<br>

> "Well, it's somewhat complicated." She proceeded to give Maddie a full account of what had gone on after she ran out of the hall. By the time she had finished, Maddie's eyes were brimming with tears and her hands were clasped across her mouth.<br>

> "Oh my God. It's all my fault..." Hermione grabbed her shoulders and looked her straight in the eyes.<br>

> "Madison Wells, nothing is your fault. Nothing. Okay?" Maddie nodded, bottom lip trembling, and got up to go.<br>

> "Maddie, where are you going?"<br>

> "To talk to Fred before visiting hours are up!" Hermione smiled and nodded at her as she dashed through the portrait. She jogged to the dungeons and nearly sprinted to the dingy room at the end of the hall. Inside were George, Harry and Ron, all sitting on stools and talking through the bars to Fred.<br>

> "Maddie! Oh my God, are you okay?" The three who weren't locked in a cage swarmed around her, wrapping her in quick hugs. Fred stood up and weakly smiled.<br>

> "Hey Squirt," he said softly. She ran over to him, her lower lip trembling violently. <br>

> "You goof. What'd you go and do this for?" He shrugged.<br>

> "It was to quiet." She giggled and thrust her arms through the bars, grasping him in a tight hug. He held her for a second, and she sniffed in his shoulder. He pulled back and said quietly, "Lavender Brown told him." Her face hardened. "What does she have against you?" he asked in desperation.<br>

> "You," she muttered, "all of you. She told me that you're 'her property', and that I was to stay away from you. Obviously I didn't listen."<br>

> "Her PROPERTY?" raged George, "I am NO ONE'S property. And even if I was, I can't stand the girl! She's been chasing me for two years!"<br>

> "You know, she did try to tell me that you enchanted all of us to make us think we were your friends," said Fred with a grimace. Ron and Harry looked livid, but didn't open their mouths.<br>

> "Yeah right. I can't make a pineapple tap-dance. I guess I'm going to be able to do a complex charm like that."<br>

> "Right, that's what I told her." Fred absently rubbed the heavily enchanted lock on the door of his confine. Maddie coughed and willed herself not to cry.<br>

> "VISITING HOURS ARE OVER!" A high, annoying voice shrieked through an invisible loudspeaker. Maddie glared at the spot where it had come from, then ran back and gave Fred a final hug.<br>

> "I'm gonna go set off a thousand dungbombs, just for you!" She waved goodbye and caught up with the rest in the hallway. They reluctantly walked away from the smelly room, silently mulling over the previous conversation.<br>

> "How does in-school work here?" asked Maddie, her voice sounding very loud in the thick quiet.<br>

> "The only thing he's allowed to do is schoolwork. The rest of the time he just sits there," said Harry.<br>

> "But that cage is so small! He's not a dog or some animal!" Maddie bit her tongue very hard, concentrating on the taste of the blood spreading through her mouth. I am NOT going to cry. I am not going to cry.<br>

> "Well, he threatened to kill Draco. I don't say he deserves this, but Dumbledore really doesn't have a huge amount of choices. It was this, or turning him over to some type of juvenile detention center. I heard him talking to Professor McGonagall, and he didn't want to." George stopped as they reached the portrait and went inside. Hermione rubbed Ron's neck, who looked very stressed out (Ron, not his neck), and Maddie promptly fell asleep on one of the couches. Harry reached over and ruffled her hair affectionately.<br>

> "She's been through a ton in the past few days, eh?"<br>

> "Understatement of the year."<br>

> (\*)<br>

> The week following was interesting to say the least. Draco's apology was stiff and obviously rehearsed.<br>

> "Madison, I am extremely sorry for these cruel things that I said and the sensitive subject matter I addressed. I never meant any harm to befall you and trust that you will harbor no hard feelings. Once again, I am sorry and hope we can continue to be friends after all the events that have transpired." Dumbledore nodded as Draco spit out the words with a pained expression on his face, his eyes clearly stating that he meant not a word of it all. Maddie smiled wickedly and demurely shook his hand.<br>

> "That apology was almost as sincere as the first one you gave me, dearest Draco," she murmured, just loud enough for only him to hear. He scowled and yanked his hand away, turning to Dumbledore.<br>

> "May I leave?" he asked pointedly. Dumbledore nodded, and the two students quickly went for the door. Maddie silently followed Draco,

leaving him only at the corridor leading to the suspension cells. She ducked into the room where everyone was waiting.<br>  
> "Sorry I'm late, I was hearing Draco's apology. He was reading from cue cards behind my head."<br>  
> "Really?" asked Hermione from her place in Ron's lap.<br>  
> "Probably. So, Fred, you excited? It's your last day! I was going to make you a cake with a picture of a bird flying out of a window, but then I remembered that I don't know how to bake." Fred chuckled.<br>  
> "No one can ever say you don't make life interesting, Shortyfries."<br>  
> "That's my specialty!" she shrieked, spinning circles in the middle of the room.<br>  
> "I see you made a nice recovery," remarked Ron, smiling.<br>  
> "I have WAY to much energy," she replied, jumping onto a stool and sitting Indian style. Just then, Filch entered, muttering angrily as he spun a keychain around his finger. Everyone watched expectantly as he worked on the series of locks that he had placed on the cage. Fred had already shoved his books and extra robes in a duffel bag, and was clutching it eagerly. Finally, the last lock was terminated, and Fred burst out of the iron bars gleefully. He scooped up Maddie and whirled her around.<br>  
> "Oh, please," muttered Filch moodily as he turned to leave. The room was soon empty, the occupants racing up the marble staircase and bounding exuberantly into the common room.<br>  
> "Okay, this definitely calls for a party!" yelled George, standing up on a table. Hermione pulled him down.<br>  
> "Hush! Listen, I'm a prefect, and I'm supposed to report-" Ron groaned.<br>  
> "Come ON, Honey. Don't be such a spoi-" Hermione cut him off, still grinning.<br>  
> "As I was saying, I'm supposed to report any student's causing trouble, so if I don't KNOW there's a party going on, it'll be harder for me to report it, right?" Maddie grinned and wiped a stack of books off a table. Hermione ran up her dormitory and came back down clutching a piece of parchment.<br>  
> "Gave it to the woman for safe keeping, eh?" George elbowed Ron and Harry, who both looked slightly embarrassed.<br>  
> "After they lost it once I confiscated it," said Hermione with a grin. "Their pride's not worth losing this baby." She tossed it to Fred. "Don't forget the butterbeer!" Fred tapped the map and Harry looked over his shoulder.<br>  
> "The path's clear! We'll be back in a few minutes." Harry and Fred slipped out of the common room and down the hall.<br>  
> "Where are they going?" she asked George.<br>  
> "Oh, that's the Marauder's Map. They're going into Hogsmeade to get us some food." Maddie wrinkled her forehead and stared at him confusedly. "I'll explain later." In a few minutes, the boys had returned, arms full of sweets, bottled drinks, cakes, and firecrackers. Dean Thomas brought down a portable radio and BLAM! the party began.<br>  
> Seventy bottles of pumpkin juice, twenty bags of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, fifty Cauldron Cakes and three spectacular fireworks shows later, kids began trickling up to bed. By one o'clock, the only ones left were Harry, George and Maddie.<br>  
> "Hey there, little girl. It's past your bedtime." George tugged on one of Maddie's pippi-style braids as she yawned.<br>  
> "I'm not tired," she said sleepily, and the boys laughed. Harry stretched and kicked an empty bottle.<br>  
> "Well, I don't know about the rest of you, but I think that went

really well. It's good to have Fred back." George nodded.<br>  
> "The place just isn't the same without him, that's for sure," he said lazily, leaning back. "Ha, Harry, look." He pointed to the chair across from him, where Maddie was lightly snoring. Harry laughed quietly and stood up.<br>  
> "Well, I'm with her. Going to wake her up?" George stared at her for a moment.<br>  
> "Nah, she looks to peaceful." He picked her up and started up the stairs. "I keep finding myself carrying girls up to bed. None of them ever come to MY bed, and yet I keep carrying up, over and over." The boys laughed for a second, then quieted as she stirred in his arms. Harry waited outside as George slipped in, lay Maddie gently on her bed and slipped back out.<br>  
> "Mission accomplished," he whispered, and they tiptoed to their room.<br>  
> (\*)<br>  
> Maddie woke up on top of her covers, fully robed. That's weird, she thought, I don't remember coming upstairs. She rolled off the bed and rubbed her eyes sleepily. I wonder what woke me. The moonlight was streaming brightly through the window to her right, and she stumbled over to close the curtains. As she wrestled with the heavy upholstery, something caught her eye. She blinked and pressed her nose to the window.<br>  
> Down below her window, bordering the Quidditch field, there was something peculiar. A large, black, spiral-shaped something was slowly spinning, giving off a pale yellow light. She shoved up the pane and stuck her head out, entranced. A tiny, tinny sound was radiating from the black, hose-like contraption, and Maddie wanted to sing along with the catchy melody. The blackness spun and spun until the sound was deafening and the light was blinding. Then, as quickly as the phenomenon had begun, everything was gone. There wasn't a single sign that anything had ever been out there. Maddie blinked hard and shook her head as she shut the window tightly. Very funny guys, she thought angrily as she climbed under the covers, spike my pumpkin juice, see if I care. But as she drifted off, she couldn't help thinking about the illusion she had just seen. If only it hadn't looked so real...<br>

End  
file.